

~~NOT REPRODUCIBLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS~~

CIA/RR GP 60-58-L
29 April 1960

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Assistant Director, ORR

SUBJECT: GRA Contribution to Power Positions Project

1. In undertaking the task of assessing the role of geographic factors in the determination of future relative power of the Free World versus the Sino-Soviet Bloc, the Geographic Research Area found it necessary to re-examine the qualities of geography that relate to the estimation of strategic power. It was determined that, within the terms of reference of the problem, the significant characteristics are those of location, shape, and size. Geography is concerned with the location, identity, and areal interrelationships of physical and cultural phenomena. It comprehends and assesses a near totality of environmental elements. By this overview, geography contributes insight and understanding relevant to many aspects of a nation's power. Conclusions based on geographic analysis, however, are valid only in specific contexts; data on the environmental elements concerned must be as specific as the conclusions sought.
2. The geographic factors of terrain, vegetation, climate, population, ethnic groups, resources, industry, transportation and communications, location, size, and shape were evaluated in relation to the problem. It was found that several of these factors could be considered only in gross terms; in the context of the problem, these were discarded as being more susceptible to analysis in conjunction with elements not essentially geographic, e.g., economy, political organization, national character, military development. The factors of location, size, and shape remain uniquely geographic and significant in that they profoundly influence the strategic situation of states or coalitions of states.
3. Many books have been written on the subject of national power, and all treat the classical elements of geography that have influenced the course of events between nations in the past. Written in retrospect, these books can identify those geographic elements which were significant.

~~NOT REPRODUCIBLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS~~

~~SECRET~~

SUBJECT: GRA Contribution to Power Positions Project

in affecting the course of events, but they do not deal with events in prospect. The geographic elements cannot be shown to have determined the events but only to have influenced them, once the objective for action was established. An evaluation of the significance of each of the three uniquely geographic factors -- location, size, and shape -- in an assessment of national or coalition power is further complicated by the amorphous nature of the term "Free World" (and in some respects of the term "Sino-Soviet Bloc"), the major imponderables that are involved in a contrasting of the two coalitions, the time reference of 1965 and 1970, and the unpredictable effects of advancing technology. Before a meaningful prognosis, based on the application of geographic factors can be made to the Power Positions paper, it is necessary that specific assumptions and conditions be stated. In its present context the problem permits only very general conclusions -- e.g., the Free World is characterized by great size and fragmentation, the latter being compounded by the discontinuity of pro-U.S. components.

4. Although it is concluded that geographic factors and the well-known geopolitical hypotheses and doctrines of MacKinder, McMahan, et al have limited applicability to a power positions estimate, the Geographic Research Area does have a distinct contribution to make. Accompanying this memorandum are two annexes that contain material of significance in the consideration of the problem at hand. Annex A describes the present and possibly future relationships between the Free World and the Sino-Soviet Bloc on the basis of those factors that are accepted as being uniquely geographic and significant. Annex B deals with a subject which is not wholly geographic but is of utmost importance in the assessments of power relationships between the two opposing groups; it is an evaluation of the relative disparity between the Free World and the Sino-Soviet Bloc in the extent of knowledge of the physical environment. The growth and expansion of nations, peacefully or otherwise, is conditioned to a large degree by the comprehensiveness of the knowledge that each has of its own physical environment and that of the others. Any disparity in the degree of such knowledge is bound to place one nation or group of nations in a position of potential advantage or disadvantage with respect to others. It is felt that an assessment of this factor is of great significance in the preparation of an estimate of power positions.

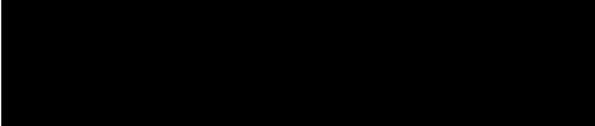
5. The Geographic Research Area encourages the task team, during its deliberations, to bear in mind the influence of such basic geographic elements as size, shape, and location on the relative power positions of

~~SECRET~~

SUBJECT: GRA Contribution to Power Positions Project

the two international groupings. It is felt that geography's greatest contribution can probably be made in the process of coordination of the contributions of other contributors. Presumably more refined assumptions and terms of reference will emerge from these contributions, thus permitting a more specific assessment of the influence of geographic and quasi-geographic factors on comparative power positions under given sets of circumstances.

25X1A9a



Chief, Geographic Research

Enclosures: 2

1. Annex A
2. Annex B